Title	Choosing the right international journal in TESOL and Applied Linguistics
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Source	*English Language Teaching World Online (ELTWO), 6*, 1-17
Published by	NUS Centre for English Language Communication

Choosing the Right International Journal in TESOL and Applied Linguistics

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Abstract

Choosing the right international journal for your research paper can be a daunting task and the process may seem complicated. This is particularly so if you have had little or no experience publishing in an international journal. This paper provides practical guidelines that could help novice writers find answers to questions such as these: What types of journals are available in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics? Which types of journals are the most suitable for their papers? What are some of the key criteria that institutions use to assess the quality of a journal? What is the review process like? How long is the wait time? What is the rejection rate of the journal? Are there journals that have lower rejection rates for novice writers? The paper also lists a number of journals that novice writers could aim for in order to increase the acceptance rates of their submissions.

Introduction

You have just completed your research and are now thinking about writing it up and submitting it to a journal. Since publishing in an international journal will get you more credit points for your career promotion and reach a broader reading audience, you decide to submit it to an international journal. However, you are not sure about how to do this. You have numerous questions swirling in your head: How do I get started? Which journal should I send my paper to? Do I just send it to any journal as long as it is 'international'? Do I send it to *TESOL Quarterly* (I've seen my professor's articles published in *TESOL Quarterly,* so perhaps I can follow his lead)? How do I find the right journal for my paper? What is the probability of my paper being accepted by a journal? Which journals are likely to be 'recognized' by my institution and the local ministry of education?

In this paper, I will address these and other related questions that novice writers normally ask. The main target audience of this paper is those who have had some research and writing experience and have presented papers in academic conferences. They are interested in having

their work published in an international journal but have little knowledge about which journals are best suited for their papers. I describe in detail the kinds of journals that novice writers should focus on and provide practical tips that would increase the chance of their papers being favorably considered by an international journal.

It is a jungle out there

It is really a jungle out there. There are so many journals in TESOL and Applied Linguistics. No one knows exactly the number but it certainly runs in the hundreds. According to Michael Lessard-Clouston of Biola University, USA, there are 710 periodicals in the fields of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (and related fields). Lessard-Clouston (2014) has compiled the names and web addresses of these journals and made them available in:

https://www.academia.edu/1743072/Periodicals_of_Interest_in_Applied_Linguistics_and _TESOL

The number could easily exceed 1,000 if we include newer (and less known) journals. Some say that this whopping number can be both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because you can always find one out of this vast jungle of journals that is most suitable for your paper, or a curse, especially for novice writers, because the number can be formidable and choosing the right one can be a nightmare.

A smaller list containing more familiar journal names can be found in a TESOL publication:

http://www.tesol.org/docs/default-source/books/how-to-get-published-in-applied-linguisti cs-serials.pdf?sfvrsn=4

The list here contains some 45 journals that ELT professionals like us are more familiar with, including the *ELT Journal, English Teaching Forum, RELC Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly.* Note however that newer journals that many of us have become familiar with recently such as *Asian EFL Journal, ELTWO, International Journal of Innovation in English Language Teaching and Research* and *Language Education in Asia* are not included.

Types of journals

What I have found useful when choosing a journal is to first find out whether the journal is primarily a teaching (pedagogical) journal or an academic (research) journal. A teaching

journal publishes articles that are intended for classroom teachers, textbook writers, curriculum developers and other language professionals. Articles published in this kind of journal tend to be shorter (around 3,000 – 4,000 words) and written in a teacher-friendly style with fewer references. The topics are normally those that are of immediate concerns to classroom practitioners. Although theoretical or research papers may be included in this type of journal, they are written with a clearer focus on classroom applications. Examples of this type of journals include the following:

- ELT Journal (http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/)
- English Teaching Forum
  (http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/forum-journal.html)
- ELTWO (www.eltworldonline.com)
- Modern English Teacher (http://www.onlinemet.com/)
- English Australia Journal
  (http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/english-australia-journal)
- TESOL Journal (http://www.tesol.org/read-and-publish/journals)

An academic journal, in contrast, is more research-oriented and directed more towards researchers than teachers. Articles published in this type of journal tend to be long (5,000 – 7,000 words or longer) and written in a more formalized academic style. The articles contain technical language and include a lot of references. In addition, the topics tend to be mainly of interest to researchers and other specialized academics. Occasionally, there are some practical papers included in academic journals, but these papers are still not practical enough for those interested in real classroom issues. Some of the flagship journals in TESOL and Applied Linguistics belong to this category:

- Applied Linguistics (http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/)
- Language Learning
  (http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journal.asp?ref=0023-
  8333&site=1)
- TESOL Quarterly (http://www.tesol.org/tq)
- Language Teaching Research (http://ltr.sagepub.com/)

Another useful thing to know about journals is whether they are generalist or niche journals. The former are more broad-based and include a wide range of topics within the broad areas of

Applied Linguistics. Journals such as *RELC Journal, Language Teaching Research, ELT Journal* fall under the generalist category. Niche journals, on the other hand, are more specialist in nature and publish articles on certain niche topics within Applied Linguistics. Examples of niche journals include *Journal of Second Language Writing, Reading in a Foreign Language, and Journal of Pragmatics*. Although it is difficult to generalize, generalist journals tend to have a lower rejection rate than niche journals.

Knowing which type of journal is the most suitable for your paper is an important first step. If your paper is a practical piece and you send it to an academic journal, chances are that your paper will be immediately returned to you by the editor with a note "We regret to inform you that your manuscript doesn't fit with the aim, scope and target readers of our journal." In other words, you have just received a straight rejection from the editor. Unfortunately, novice writers are prone to making avoidable mistakes like this one.

What is the rejection rate of the journal?

Rejection rate simply refers to the percentage of manuscripts rejected relative to the total number of submissions received by a journal in a given year. A journal with a rejection rate of 90% means that 9 in 10 submissions are rejected. Most established journals in our field probably have a rejection rate of about 70%; thus, only 3 in 10 submissions have a chance of being included in the journals.

Although information about the rejection or acceptance rate of a journal is not normally publicly available, you can get a sense of how hard/easy it is to get published in the journal by visiting its website and reading its publication policy, author submission guidelines and other relevant information. Here are a couple of paragraphs taken from the website of *Language Learning*, one of the top tier journals in our field, which has a high rejection rate:

> **Author Guidelines**
>
> *Language Learning* is an **international journal** that publishes **rigorous**, **original empirical research** as well as **systematic critical literature reviews** and **innovative methodological contributions**. Domains covered include first and second language acquisition in naturalistic as well as tutored contexts, including second, foreign, and heritage language, bilingual education, immersion programs, and study abroad. All

disciplinary perspectives are welcome, from linguistics and psychology to education, anthropology, sociology, cognitive or the neurosciences.

As one of **the premier peer-reviewed journals** in the field of applied linguistics, established in 1948 at the University of Michigan, *Language Learning* strives to promote research of the **highest quality**, from **thorough literature reviews** and **solid theoretical frameworks to rigorous data analysis**, **cogent argumentation** and clear presentation. (Source: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lang.12035/full)

I have put in bold some of the key words that provide an indication of the highly demanding requirements to get published in this journal. It is perhaps one of the most difficult mainstream language journals to get published in. Not surprisingly, the acceptance rate of this journal is below 20% (see Table 1 below).

Compare the description above with the one found in the *English Teaching Forum,* a pedagogically oriented journal for language teachers. I have emboldened some of the key words that indicate that the journal is looking for more practice-oriented papers which reflect current thinking in the field but do not necessarily have to be based on original empirical research studies. Naturally, the rejection rate of this journal is not as high as that of *Language Learning*.

English Teaching Forum **Guidelines for Authors**

English Teaching Forum is an **international, refereed journal** published by the U.S. Department of State for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). The mission of English Teaching Forum is to **contribute to the professional development** of its readers around the world by offering articles that reflect **current theory and practice** in English language teaching.

English Teaching Forum accepts submissions of previously unpublished articles from English teachers, teacher trainers, and program administrators on a wide variety of topics in second/foreign language

education, including **principles and methods of** language teaching; **activities and techniques** for teaching the language skills and subskills; **classroom-based studies and action research**; needs analysis, curriculum and syllabus design; assessment, testing, and evaluation; teacher training and development; materials writing; and English for Specific Purposes. Most of the articles published in English Teaching Forum are submitted by its readers.

(Source: http://americanenglish.state.gov/submission-guidelines)

Other sources of information about a journal's rejection rate can come from your more senior colleagues, especially those who have had their fair share of publishing in international journals, and former professors with whom you did your postgraduate studies. Do consult them as they should be able to give you a rough idea about the rejection rate of a journal.

Alternatively, you can write to the journal editors and ask about their rejection rate. I recently wrote to two journal editors asking for information about the rejection rates of their journals. For example, this journal, *ELTWO*, a five-year old teaching journal published by the Centre for English Language Communication/National University of Singapore, reported a rejection rate of about 50-60%. *RELC Journal*, an international journal published by Sage (UK), reported a rejection rate of over 90%, which puts itself in the same league as the other internationally acclaimed journals such as the *ELT Journal, Applied Linguistics and TESOL Quarterly*.

Research papers that look at journal quality can also be a reliable source of information. Egbert (2007), for example, recently published a paper in *TESOL Quarterly* that looked at a number of indicators that could be used to assess the quality of a journal. Although rejection/acceptance rate is listed as one of the quality indicators, Egbert was quick to point out that it was not the most important indicator of the quality of a journal. Table 1 provides a list of top journals and their acceptance rates.

Table 1. Acceptance rate of journals in TESOL and Applied Linguistics.

Journal	Estimated acceptance rate
Applied linguistics	15-20%
English Language Teaching (ELT) Journal	10%
English for Specific Purposes	25-30%
International Journal of Intercultural Relations	60%
JALT Journal	10%
Journal of English for Academic Purposes	25-30%
Journal of Language, Identity, and Education	25%
Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development	40%
Journal of Pragmatics	23%
Journal of Second Language Writing	15%
Language Learning	15-18%
Language Testing	30%
The Modern Language Journal	15-20%
Studies in Second Language Acquisition	10-20%
System	20%
TESOL Quarterly	8.5%

(Data from Edbert, 2007, pp 165-7)

Using a number of quality indicators (opinions from members of TESOL Research Interest Section obtained through a survey, rejection rate, impact factor, publication timeliness, availability and accessibility of the journals, etc), Egbert (2007) listed the following as the top seven journals in TESOL and Applied linguistics.

Table 2. Top seven journals according to Edbert's (2007) quality indicators (in alphabetical order).

Name of Journal
1.   Applied Linguistics
2.   English Language Teaching Journal

3.   Journal of Second Language Writing

4.   Language Learning

5.   Modern Language Journal

6.   Studies in Second Language Acquisition

7.   TESOL Quarterly

If you are a novice writer, you would probably not want to send your papers to these top journals, nor would you want to send your manuscripts to other journals with high rejection rates. Not quite yet! You may instead consider sending your papers to journals with a lower rejection rate so as to increase your chance of getting accepted. Once you have had enough experience of journal publishing and have developed more self-confidence, you may want to try to submit to those journals that have a higher rejection rate. In a later section of this paper, I will list a number of journals that novice writers might aim for.

What is the review process like?

Most established journals employ a blind review process. There are two types: a single-blind or double-blind review. In a single blind review, the reviewers know the identity of the author of the manuscript, but the author does not know who the reviewers are. In a double-blind review, neither the author nor the reviewers know the identity of each other. The double-blind review is more common nowadays, as this process ensures that manuscripts are more fairly and objectively reviewed by reviewers. Thus, a manuscript is accepted or rejected based on its own merit, and not because of any other factors that have nothing to do with the quality of the manuscript.

It is important to know that manuscripts are first screened by the editor before they are sent out for review. Manuscripts that are poorly written, contain language errors, do not match the aim and scope of the journals, do not follow the submission guidelines will most likely result in a swift rejection. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that you make sure that you have written your manuscript according to the author/submission guidelines (available in the journal's website) and that you have carefully proof-read your manuscript before submitting it to a journal. Failure to do so would cause unnecessary delay in getting your work published.

Are the journals 'recognized' by my institution?

Getting published in an international journal is often linked to promotion or reappointment purposes. Because of this, the question of whether a journal is 'recognized' or 'approved' often arises. It is however not easy to answer this question as institutions often have their own lists of 'recognized' or 'approved' journals, which are created based on a set of criteria.

Listed below are some of the relevant criteria that institutions often use to determine the quality of a journal:

a. The journal has an international editorial board whose members are leading experts in their fields;

b. It has an international review board whose members are respected scholars in their areas of specializations;

c. It publishes papers contributed by people from different countries;

d. It has a reasonable rejection rate;

e. It has a reasonable impact factor;

f. It is published regularly and in a timely manner;

g. It enjoys a wide readership and is read and cited by scholars in the field.

One criterion that is not often stated explicitly but that is commonly understood as being important is that the journal should be registered in an internationally recognized indexing organization. Internationally recognized indexing organizations include EBSCO, Scopus, SSCI, MLA and Thomson Reuters. Internationally recognized journals usually publish this information on their website. The *ELT journal*, for example, subscribes to the following abstracting and indexing services:

Arts and Humanities Citation Index

British Education Index

Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts

PROQUEST DATABASE : Arts & Humanities Full Text

Scopus

Social Sciences Citation Index (from 2009)

(Source: http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/eltj/about.html)

Another criterion of vital importance for writers to consider before submitting their manuscript is the availability of detailed information about the journal and its publication policy. Reputable journals publish the following information on their website:

a. Aim and scope of the journal (research or practice-oriented, topic coverage, etc.)

b. Submission guidelines (e.g., length, format, font type and size, spacing, referencing style, spelling)

c. Review policy (e.g., refereed or non-refereed; review wait time)

d. Frequency of publication (e.g., three times a year)

e. Other pertinent information (e.g., research ethics guidelines, copyright, etc.)

If this information is not readily available, there is reason to suspect that the quality of the journal may be questionable and you may not want to publish with this journal.

It is important that writers follow the submission guidelines as closely as possible. One of the most common reasons for a rejection is that the manuscript does not follow the guidelines (Worsham, 2008). Many people whom I have spoken to are in full agreement with Worsham's observation. Just to give an example from my own experience, the *ELT Journal*, a top teaching journal in our field, is very particular about its submission guidelines.

Length

Articles of around 3,500 words in length are preferred. It is not possible for us to accept articles over 4,000 words long. Please give a word count at the end of your article. Word counts should include tables and appendices, but may exclude the abstract and the list of references.

Title and abstract

Please give your article a brief, clear, and informative title. Titles should preferably be no more than 50 characters long, with an absolute maximum of 70, including spaces. Begin your article with an abstract of no more than 150 words summarizing your main points. Please do not make reference to other publications in the abstract; any abbreviations defined in the abstract (other than those listed above) should be spelt out again on first mention in the text.

(Source: http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/eltj/for_authors/)

The editor will not be too happy if you send a manuscript that is longer than 4000 words with a very long title. If he happens to be in a good mood, he might drop you a nice note to say that you should trim your paper and shorten your title and then send the revised manuscript to him. If he happens to be in a bad mood, he might send you a terse rejection note right away.

Tips for novice writers

Choosing the right journal for your first manuscript can be daunting, but it is by no means an impossible task. As I mentioned earlier, there are so many journals in our field that we are actually spoilt for choice. We should look at this as a blessing. Just look at our colleagues who teach other foreign languages (e.g., German, Japanese or Korean). Many have a hard time getting their work published because there are not that many journals that cater for these languages. If we invest sufficient time and effort, and if we are diligent enough to do a bit of research on the kinds of journals that are available, we will definitely find the right one for our paper.

The following tips, which I have put together based on my own experience and also from talking to many colleagues who have served as journal editors and reviewers, should be of great help to those who wish get themselves published in an international journal.

Tip No. 1   Make sure that you find a journal that matches the type of paper you have written. If yours is a research paper, then send it to a research-oriented journal; if it is a pedagogical paper, send it to a teaching-oriented journal. If you are not sure, ask! Seek advice from people who know.

Tip No. 2   Aim low. If this is your first attempt, find a journal that you feel gives you a higher chance of getting accepted. Find a journal that has a lower rejection rate. Perhaps aim for one that has a rejection rate of about 50% or lower. If you have difficulty identifying a journal of this type, consult your colleagues. If you are a member of Teacher Voices, a FB professional development forum for ELT professionals, you can post questions and seek advice from forum members. There is a good chance that you will receive valuable advice. Here is the link: http://www.facebook.com/groups/teachervoices/

Tip No. 3   Once you've set your eyes on a journal, familiarize yourself with it. Read through the submission guidelines carefully, contact the editor if need be for further information and instructions, get a feel for the kinds of papers that have been published by reading some of the published articles. This is a key step that you should not skip. Doing this will increase your chance of getting accepted.

Tip No. 4   Start with teaching-oriented journals (of the generalist type) as these tend to have a lower entry barrier (i.e., higher acceptance rate). Listed below are some journals that, in my opinion, have a fairly high acceptance rate:

- English Australia Journal (http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/english_australia_journal.html)

- English Language Teacher Education and Development (http://www.elted.net)

- English Teaching Forum (http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/forum-journal.html)

- TESOL in Context (http://www.tesol.org.au/Publications/TESOL-in-Context)

- The New English Teacher (http://www.gse.au.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93:net&catid=42:net&Itemid=116)

- The Language Teacher (http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/)

If you want to further increase the likelihood of your paper being accepted, go for newer journals. Newer journals tend to have a higher acceptance rate, not because they are of low quality, but because they don't have enough submissions to get their issues out regularly. Because of this, they tend to be less stringent in their selection process. There is however no guarantee that your paper will be accepted if you send it to a new journal. Here are some of the newer journals:

- Accents Asia (http://www.accentsasia.org/index.html)

- Beyond Words (http://journal.wima.ac.id/index.php/BW)

- ELTWO (www.eltworldonline.com)

- European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TELF (http://theeuropeanjournal.eu/)

- Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics (http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/IJAL)

- International Journal of Innovation in English Language Teaching and Research (https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=24870)

- Language Education in Asia (http://www.camtesol.org/index.php/publication)

- Voices in Asia (http://viajournal.org/)

Tip No. 5   There are a number of well-known, peer-reviewed journals that have fairly high acceptance rates. These journals can be a great stepping stone to getting published in a fully refereed journal. Typically, your manuscript is reviewed by the editor and his/her editorial team, but not sent out for an external blind review. This often speeds up the process of publication, as the wait time is usually shorter. However, this does not mean that the journal is of low quality. I've listed some of the established non-refereed journals, which enjoy wide readership and often publish articles written by well-known people in the field.

- English Teaching Professional (http://www.etprofessional.com/)

- Humanizing Language Teaching (http://www.hltmag.co.uk/jun12/index.htm)

- Modern English Teacher (http://www.onlinemet.com/)

Tip No. 6   If you feel that you are not ready yet to write a full paper for a journal, you can try your hand at writing a book review. Writing a book review can help you become familiar with the kind of academic

writing that is valued by journal publishers. You can also write a short commentary (a couple of pages long) and get it published in a special section of a journal. *ELTWO*, for example, has a section called the *ELT Court*, where people write a short piece expressing their opinions on a controversial or contentious topic. Again this is a good practice exercise for junior writers before they develop enough confidence to write a full paper.

Tardy (2008) and Renandya (2012) offer some useful writing practice ideas to help you hone your academic writing skills. These include writing a conference paper, writing a conference session report, publishing in a conference proceeding, editing a conference proceeding and editing a book. Writing a short piece for ELT-related newsletters can be a good practice exercise. Here are some newsletters:

- IATFL Voices (http://www.iatefl.org/iatefl/iatefl-voices)
- TESOL Connections (http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolc/issues/2012-06-01/email.html)
- KATE Forum (http://www.kate.or.kr/Publications/forum.asp)

Tip No. 7 Once you have had several articles published in these journals and have developed more confidence, you could try sending your manuscripts to the top tier journals such as *Applied Linguistics, the ELT Journal, Language Learning, TESOL Quarterly* and *Second Language Writing*. Even if your paper does not get accepted by these journals, you could still learn from the process and receive valuable comments from the reviewers, which you could then use to revise or rewrite your paper for submission to another journal.

Tip No. 8 Some international journals charge as much as US$500 to get your paper published. Interestingly, despite the rather steep publication fee, these journals are quite popular with novice writers. It is best that

we avoid these journals. Jeffrey Beall, who works as an academic librarian at the University of Colorado Denver, in Denver, Colorado, has compiled a list of bogus, fly-by-night publishers whose main motivation is profit-making. For a complete list of predatory, open access publishers, please visit http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/. For a list of questionable individual journals: http://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/.

It might be tempting to send our work to these journals, but my advice is for us to stay away from them or any other journals that charge publications fees. Since there are many other quality journals in TESOL and Applied Linguistics that do not charge fees, why go for ones that do and whose quality might be questionable?

A useful resource for spotting a bogus journal is available here: https://www.academia.edu/2369406/Spotting_Bogus_Journals_in_TESOL_and_Applied_Linguistics.

Conclusion

For a novice writer, getting published in an international journal may seem like a very long journey with no end in sight. But as the Chinese proverb goes: A journey of a thousand mile begins with the first step. Reading this article is like taking the first step towards that long journey; the next step would be for you to invest time in familiarizing yourself with the different types of journals that you plan to send your manuscript to, understanding the submission requirements of the journal that you have selected, preparing your manuscript according to these requirements (making sure that you follow the submission guidelines as closely as possible), and then submitting it to the editor.

And the next step? Wait until you hear from the editor whether your paper is accepted without revision (extremely rare), accepted with minor revisions (quite rare), accepted with more than minor revisions (quite common), accepted with major revisions (common), or rejected (also common).

Acknowledgements

I'm grateful for the comments and suggestions from numerous colleagues on the earlier drafts of this paper, in particular to Flora Debora Floris and Herwindy Tedjaatmadja of Petra Christian University, Sisilia Halimi of Universitas Indonesia and Linda Hanington of the National Institute of Education.

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